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RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5061
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SUBJECT: FUNDING FOR SYMPOSIUM ON WHEAT STEM RUST FOR PAKISTAN,
AFGHANISTAN, AND IRAN

¶1. (SBU) The establishment of a Trilateral Board to support collaborative and applied agricultural research was agreed to at the agricultural breakout session of the May 7-8 trilateral meetings with the U.S., Afghanistan, and Pakistan. In response, the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) has proposed hosting a symposium under the auspices of the Trilateral Board to address the threat of the UG-99 wheat stem rust to the regional wheat crop.

¶2. (SBU) PARC intends to invite leading scientists from Afghanistan, the United States and other countries to attend the symposium, scheduled to take place in Islamabad this year in mid-August. PARC would also like to invite scientists from Iran, where UG-99 is already present and causing crop damages. PARC has requested USG support or co-sponsor the event. Post proposes the use of USD 10,000 of Embassy Islamabad's Public Diplomacy funds to co-sponsor the symposium.

¶3. (SBU) The wheat crops of Pakistan and Afghanistan are threatened by a new, devastating form of stem rust known as UG-99. This is a new strain of stem rust that is virulent on more than 85 percent of all wheat varieties globally, and represents a potential threat to world food security on a similar scale to that posed by avian flu for human health. Since discovery in Uganda in 1999, the disease has spread to Kenya in 2001, Ethiopia in 2003, Yemen in 2006, and Iran in 2007. Mapping the progress of the disease shows that it is only a matter of time before the disease appears in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: The participation of Iran in a regional symposium on UG-99 makes sound scientific sense, as there have been reported incidences of UG-99 in Iran. The prevalence of UG-99 in this year's crops in Iran has direct implications for the prospects of next year's crops in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

PATTERSON